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Abstract

The Constructionist approach, relatively a new approach in the linguistics literature, grew as an alternative to the mainstream generative approach, which was rule based and componential in nature. The theory initially developed by Fillmore, Kay and O'Connor (1988) aimed at explaining the idiomatic expressions in language, which was largely unexamined or treated as exceptional (peripheral) within the existing approach. This formed a basis for the Constructionist approaches towards linguistic study.

Goldberg's approach is known as the Cognitive Construction Grammar (1995), which is based on the Fillmore's approach, which treats the emergence of Argument Structure Constructions (see below) under the same learning mechanism as idioms. Goldberg's approach is a syntactic analysis of argument structures, which claims that the verbs alone do not determine the arguments, but verbs and Argument Structure Constructions together determine the meaning in language. This approach can explain facts like why certain verbs can occur with multiple argument structures, for instance, the verb 'kick', in English; can occur in at least 6 different argument structures. Moreover, the approach can also explain the creative use of verbs in certain context, for instance, the typical intransitive verb 'sneeze' occurs with only one argument, i.e., the subject. However, there are instances where the verb 'sneeze' occurs in a construction with a subject, object and oblique. This is what Goldberg terms as 'coercion', i.e., a verb is coerced into a construction. The typical cases can be termed as 'fusion'. Thus, the theory claims that verbs are used with different ASCs, instead of the fact that the verb determines the number of arguments.

Within the Goldberg's constructionist approach, ASC denote generalized events which has general 'argument roles', whereas verbs denote specific events, which has specific 'participant role' (thematic roles). The fusion of a verb with an ASC is determined by two principles, the 'semantic coherence' principle and the 'correspondence' principle. The semantic coherence principle states that the 'participant role' of the verb must be an instance of the 'argument role' of the construction. Whereas, the correspondence principle states that if a verb consists of three participant roles, then one of them can be fused with a nonprofiled role, of the construction, i.e. the oblique.

'Frame Semantics' (Fillmore???) and construction grammar are regarded as sister theories. The frame semantic knowledge that is associated with a verb also plays a major role in the combination of a verb's 'participant' role with the construction's 'argument' role. An event has various elements. Linguistically, only those elements which are prominent in the event are realized in terms of direct grammatical relation, in terms of core encoding, and those which are less prominent are encoded as obliques. This is called the 'syntactically relevant aspect of verb meaning'. Thus, the syntax is a representation of the event denoted by a verb.

Argument Structure Constructions The Case of Assamese

by Reetom Borkotoky

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